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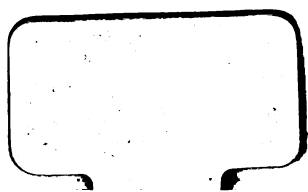
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PERENNIAL
COURTSHIP
AND
OTHER TALES





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A PERENNIAL COURTSHIP.

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A PERENNIAL COURTSHIP.

EDITH LENNOX loved Anselm Hiram Waveney. He was good-looking enough, but moral beauty was what she went in for; his eyes, so gentle and pure, diffused a glamour not to be withstood, and all unasked she gave her heart away. There are a few—a very few—amongst men who can look on women without the soul's mirror being thumb'd by any fleshly thought. These are of the free, concerning whom there is no let or hindrance that the natural tendencies should not have play; consequently they generally regard the other sex with respectful affection, and are wont to pay its representatives, young and old, unstinted homage in all kinds of chivalrous attentions.

Anselm, as one of the free spirits in question, was a staunch upholder of gynocracy, and the girls of Malham considered him to be a very useful young man indeed. Nevertheless to Edith Lennox his manner was cold and reserved; his arm, so readily proffered to others, was at her command only in cases of obvious necessity; and, altogether, he showed a marked disinclination to being alone in her company.

Now Edith, with her rich golden hair, dark blue eyes, and exquisitely shaped features, ranked as the acknowledged most beautiful maiden in Malham; male adorers by the dozen were at her beck, but she wanted what it appeared she could not have. Not being of the unfeminine kind that woos if not wooed, she endured the pangs of heart-hunger in modest silence; and the only outward evidence of interior suffering was a continuing increase of loveliness.

Matters thus rested when one evening Anselm and Edith met at a social gathering. It was necessary she should be seen home by some one; and all the gentlemen present, save the apparently unloving loved one, having partners, upon him fell the office of cavalier. Edith felt full of distressful happiness while leaning upon the arm which she knew supported her so unwillingly. Their road lay across a railway, and, each being absorbed in thought, neither paid much attention to external objects. Presently Edith received an extremely violent shove, which sent her staggering down the embankment. Turning with surprised indignation to ask the meaning of such rudeness, a blood-freezing sight met her eyes. An express train rushed by, knocked her companion over, and disappeared. Anselm rolled down the bank, and then lay motionless. Could it be that her heart's desire—No; a little hand placed against his heart found proof of life. Blushing with shame and fear, though no one was there to see, Edith pressed a kiss upon the young man's lips, and then felt like a guilty thing. What had she done?—this man who was not her property,

and, for aught she knew, belonged to some one else! Anselm opened his eyes, and gazed up at the bending kisser. A strange look it was; for intense tenderness was mixed with deepest sorrow.

"Are you much hurt, Mr. Waveney?" inquired Edith, hoping that he knew nothing of her unmaidenly act.

"No," he replied. "I had just about cleared the train. But my ankle is sprained, and I am afraid—" here the red corpuscles ran hastily back to the deserted cheeks—"that I must ask you to help me home. Hope you have sustained no injury? I had no time to be very careful."

"Oh no; I am not hurt at all. You saved my life, and nearly lost your own through it."

Again that very tender expression, as if he had saved something to him extremely precious; but very strange the murmured words, uttered apparently for his own behoof, "My life—ah! if it were my own!"

Edith had to be cavalier now: her companion's weight, for all his efforts to the contrary, was exceedingly heavy; but the supporter did not mind that at all. Nor, though their progress was slow, would she have found the business at all tedious but for the pain Anselm endured. Every step was evidently agony to him, but he displayed great patience. Ashton Villa, where he lived, was at length reached: and Mrs. Waveney, who saw them through the window, rushed out in great alarm; but she was reassured on finding there was nothing worse than a

sprained ankle. Edith took her departure, and all the way home could think of nothing but those tender looks. Much internal bubbling, with its outward signs, accompanied her efforts to place the precious regards in the memory's most secret closet. All night long she stayed therein, watching her treasures, and the beams of morning came to eyes that were weary with a pleasant weariness.

As to Anselm, he lay for an hour or two in great pain; but his mother's efforts at mitigation were in the end successful, and he was able to dismiss her for the night. His parting words were, "Make my apologies to Hiram, mother. Tell him I am very sorry, and will take more care of myself for the future."

This message was conveyed to Hiram in the morning. "It's a confounded nuisance," he grumbled. "How would he like me to serve him so, I should like to know? D—n, how my ankle burns! Come, don't stand there looking like a statue of helplessness: do something or other, will you."

Mrs. Waveney fomented the ankle, and Hiram felt better. "But it's a d—d bore," he muttered. "Suppose I shall be laid up for a fortnight or more, and my business going to rack and ruin."

"You are not so patient as Anselm," said his mother. "He was in dreadful pain last night, and bore it all without a murmur."

"Ah! but he's a regular saint," sneered Hiram, "and I don't pretend to be amongst the godly. Besides, all very well for him to be patient, who does nothing."

"How can he do anything, Hiram?"

"Oh! I'd find a way, if in his place."

"What, with only six hours a day at his disposal!—for I suppose you would not like him to abstain from the sleep which is so necessary for you both."

"Well, I don't want any jaw, but rather breakfast, if you will excuse my French."

The ankle slowly mended, and at last was all right, much to Miss Lennox's delight. She paid frequent visits of inquiry, though always refusing to enter the house. Mrs. Waveney answered the diffident rat-tat, and each time bestowed upon the visitor just such similar looks as those which memory loved to fondle, namely, of both tenderness and grief.

As soon as the invalid was fairly convalescent, the visits ceased; but a short time afterwards Anselm met Miss Lennox at church, at the Wednesday evening service. He never came on Sunday, either of a morning or afternoon, and thereby caused some scandal. "So inconsistent," said Miss Lawson, "for a man to be devout on Wednesday, and to act the heathen on Sunday! I have been credibly informed that he spends the hours of worship strolling about and smoking a vulgar clay pipe."

After the service was over, Anselm accompanied Edith out, and offered his arm, saying, "Would you allow me?"

Trembling, she consented. Was a joyful change, then, about to take place?

A little silence as they walked along together, and then Anselm said, "Miss Lennox, I was quite sensible,

though in a fainting condition, as I lay by the railway side that evening."

His tone, no less than the statement made, showed Edith that her malefeasance was known to its object. Hence burning blushes and a feeling of deep degradation, such as criminals experience when detection, with its shame, overtakes them.

Proceeded Anselm,—“I am in a position of the greatest difficulty. Miss Lennox—I must not call you Edith—what if I should say that I have long loved you with the deepest love of which a man can be capable, and yet that by a cruel fate I cannot, and must not, think of asking your hand in marriage?”

Perceptible stiffening of the petite form. What did he mean? An existing but disliked engagement, perhaps, which he was obliged to carry out. But then his love should have remained, as before, unconfessed. Divulged under such circumstances, his lips and her ears were alike dishonoured. She made to withdraw her arm; and he, while offering no opposition, said,—

“You think, perhaps, that I am bound to some other woman. Such is not the case. Nevertheless a strange but insuperable obstacle prevents my saying what the humblest of men may say to the woman he loves. Alas that it should be so! But for what took place at the railway side—happiest and most glorious moment that will ever be of my lonely life—but for what then took place, I had never opened my mouth. Now, however, I find it impossible to keep silence. You must know my unhappy secret, if only that it may enable you to turn your eyes from me for evermore. I should be

guilty of cruelty and wickedness in not letting you see how matters stand."

What did this mean? He loved her deeply; he was not bound to any other woman; and yet there was an insuperable bar. Was it perchance some black deed he had committed? Terrible for her to hear of that in him; but would she consider even the worst that could be told an insuperable obstacle? Her heart said "No."

She timidly asked, "Do you want to tell me something, then, Mr. Waveney?"

The very question was an act of surrender. Here was the precious treasure actually waiting to be possessed, and yet he must refrain.

"I would rather you heard what there is to hear from my mother's lips, if you would kindly accompany me home for that purpose. I could only retail the facts from hearsay."

Edith was quite willing. She had taken a great liking to Mrs. Waveney, and rather fancied there was something like reciprocation. Preferable, too, in every way that the secret, whatever it was, should be divulged by the mother rather than the son. Besides, there could be a free discussion of ways and means; and what might not be effected by two women putting their wits together? It was too dreadful to think of losing Anselm, now that she knew his heart was hers.

They arrived at Ashton Villa; and Anselm, after depositing Edith on the sofa, said, "Mother, tell Miss Lennox my story. I will return in an hour, in order to take her home."

The two ladies kissed in quite a motherly and

daughterly fashion, after which preliminary the elder dashed into the subject at once.

"You know, my dear, that I have only one son."

"Yes, Mrs. Waveney."

"Perhaps you are not equally aware that I have two sons."

A stare of intense bewilderment. "I—I don't understand."

"Of course not: how should you? What I mean will be explained by the facts. Now listen patiently, and don't interrupt, or I shall be cross. My son, Anselm Hiram Waveney, has always lived a double life. I first began to notice this when he was three years of age; but I prefer to believe that it was the case from the first—even from his birth. Of course that is only my idea, and may be taken for what it is worth. Ever since the age I mention he has been to me two different sons, one of whom I got into the way of calling Anselm, and the other Hiram. About seven o'clock every morning Anselm becomes insensible. After this has lasted half an hour, he awakes as Hiram, joins me at breakfast, then goes off to his business; and before five returns home, because at about that hour it is his turn to become insensible, from which insensibility the person who awakes is Anselm. So that you see I always breakfast with Hiram and tea with Anselm. Except from hearsay, they would be absolutely ignorant of each other's existence; for neither of them knows anything whatever of what the other thinks, says, or does. That is the first chapter of my story, Edith. Here are two persons inhabiting

the same body ; neither knows anything of or has any control over the other ; each lives his own life ; each is gifted with a will and a conscience of his own. I say, therefore, that they are two different men. Ah ! and how very different ! That next remains to be told ; and it is a matter that vitally concerns yourself, because you will then see what difficulties there are in the way of a certain marriage, which I should dearly like to take place, if it be possible.. Listen, then. Anselm is pure-souled, truthful, and scrupulously just ; he is unselfish and considerate in all his actions ; has always a kind word for every one, and helps the needy to the utmost of his means. Indeed, he is one that truly leads the better life ; while as a son what shall I say of him ? Never mother found such sweet comfort as I have always found in him. Now Hiram is altogether the reverse : sordid, avaricious, unscrupulous, coarse-minded, thoroughly selfish—one who sneers at everything, who laughs at the sufferings of his fellow-creatures, and who, I am sure, has for me, his mother, as much affection as he shows respect—namely, none at all. It would not be right for me to speak like this of my own son if it were not absolutely necessary you should know everything. Well, my dear, you are now acquainted with all the facts ; what do you think of them ? ”

“ It is a very dreadful thing for poor Anselm. I may call him Anselm, may I not ? ”

“ Certainly, Edith ; why not ? You love each other dearly, and I for one see no good reason why you should not become man and wife.”

"A very dreadful thing indeed. I heard my cousins Herrington speaking about similar cases, but did not believe they could be really true."

"True enough in this instance, you see."

"Yes; and how awful for Anselm! It would not be so bad if his brother—"

"You are like me: I look upon them as brothers. But no fraternal feeling exists between them at all; on the contrary, each dislikes the other heartily. I have always considered that the one flaw in Anselm's character. He has often said, 'Hiram is the only man in the world I dislike.' 'It is a wrong feeling,' I have replied: 'he must be either yourself or your brother.' 'Don't acknowledge anything of the kind,' he answers; 'there cannot be any real relationship. I look upon him as an alien spirit, who, having taken possession of my frame, lives and acts in a way that I detest'—which you know, Edith, is a most irrational observation; for there is no reason to suppose that the frame belongs to him any more than to Hiram. It always annoys me to hear him talking like that—as if the one were not my son just as much as the other. Yes, that is Anselm's weak point."

Miss Lennox was not prepared to admit that Anselm had any weak point; while, as to his disliking Hiram, she was disposed to hate that personage most thoroughly.

"And you consider," she asked, "that there is nothing to prevent my marrying Anselm?" She felt quite comfortable with Mrs. Waveney, and able to talk freely.

"Yes, that is my opinion. Of course Hiram's consent would be necessary, but that could be purchased. I have not the means myself, but you are rich. See how free I am ; but mincing matters is not my style at all."

"Oh ! I would willingly pay whatever is requisite ; but how about Anselm,—would he agree ?"

"Well, we two are at loggerheads on the subject. He says the idea is not to be thought of for a moment."

"Perhaps he thinks it would not be right as—as—"

"As he and Hiram are two different persons, you mean. Yes, he has scruples in that respect, I know. But his chief difficulty seems to be about yourself, as, for instance, what you would feel on finding such a person as Hiram making his appearance every morning at half-past seven, while Anselm would then disappear until tea-time."

"I could endure everything for his sake," said Edith, in a low voice.

"But supposing Hiram made any of his nasty sarcastic remarks ?"

"I should expect him to treat me with civility, as lady of the house," replied the young lady, with great dignity. "If he presumed to be rude in any way, it would be necessary for me to explain to him the elementary principles which should govern the conduct of a gentleman."

"Good," said Mrs. Waveney, laughing, "very good ; and you would not feel that it was Anselm who was behaving badly ?"

"No," answered Edith, opening her large eyes to

their fullest extent in surprise; "how could it be?"

"It is very strange that, like me, you should so thoroughly separate them in your mind. But now tell me, suppose Hiram were to speak against Anselm—which I may add is more than likely—and suppose you, being thoroughly put out at such an affront to your husband, were to slap the asperser's face: I ought not to consider it possible you could be so unladylike, but we will assume the fact—would you feel that you were really slapping Hiram's face, and not Anselm's?"

Edith was temporarily taken aback by the question, seeing that it would be the same face that had been kissed by the railway side; however, she promptly came up to time, and answered,—

"I might feel ashamed at having shown such a want of good breeding, but there would be no such feeling of remorse as if it were Anselm's; for me, it would be the same as if he had gone out for a walk until tea-time. As to Mr. Hiram, I should take care to see very little of him; and, fortunately, he will be out all day. My plan would be to rise early, have breakfast with Anselm before he became insensible, and leave the other to breakfast by himself."

Mrs. Waveney laughed immoderately, and for a time was *hors de combat*. When able to speak, she exclaimed, "There you better me, Edith; for I never forget that they have only one body between them. Do you think Hiram will consent to be deprived of his breakfast?—they have not too appetites, you know."

There would be a dreadful row, I can assure you. As it is, Hiram often complains of the meat suppers which I admitted Anselm takes with me. He says heavy suppers are very bad things for the system, and prevent a fellow enjoying his breakfast."

"It is all very strange; and you really mean to say that they have no knowledge at all of each other's doings?"

"None whatever, and never had; at any rate, not since three years of age, when I began to take notice. The insensibility, indeed, commenced long before that, and used to alarm me very much at first. Probably it always came on, only of course I would think it was the baby going to sleep. By-the-bye, my dear, here are two of their letters," taking them out of a case; "they will prove them to be two different individuals, if handwriting goes for anything."

Edith looked at the letters: certainly there was not a character in common. She observed, not without displeasure, that Hiram was by far the better writer.

"Yes," said Mrs. Waveney, noticing her look, "his handwriting is the best; he had the advantage of a first-rate education. Anselm never went to school: what he knows I taught him myself. He would not be much against Hiram in a competitive examination, I am afraid; but, at any rate, he did not learn from me swearing and other bad habits, such as the other one contracted at school."

Anselm now came in, and hurriedly took Edith off, saying, "It is late, and your aunt will be anxious." She was an orphan heiress. When outside the house

he inquired,—“ You have heard my story, Miss Lennox ? ”

“ ‘ Miss Lennox ’—must you call me that, Anselm ? ” very timidly his christian name now crawled off her tongue, for all it had been bandied so freely to and fro at Ashton Villa.

“ Well,” he answered lovingly, “ I will call you Edith for to-night. Would that I could say ‘ my Edith ! ’ ”

“ And why can you not ? ” she asked. He was not to be resigned without a struggle.

“ You would let me,” he cried, “ after what you have heard ? ” But, stopping the willing “ yes ” in the middle of its career, “ I cannot allow it : how can I ? ”

Edith felt desperate. For that night, she would be unmaidenly, and shame might wait until the morrow. “ Anselm, after all that I have heard—and I have heard everything—I am willing to be your wife.” Here she burst into tears at the thought of having been so bold and forward ; and, thus relieved, felt inclined to be more bold and forward still, if necessary.

Anselm walked on for a short distance without saying anything : a fight with the emotions was evidently going on. Ultimately he murmured, “ Edith, it cannot be.”

“ But why not, Anselm ? Your mother sees no objection. Do you think it would not be right ? ”

“ I have grave doubts upon that point certainly. I share in my mother’s opinion that Hiram and myself are two different persons : I even believe that we are two spirits in one body. It must be so, in fact, for I am not responsible for his actions, nor has he anything

to do with mine. That being so, I should find it difficult to persuade myself that either of us has any right to contract matrimony. However, putting that aside as possibly a mere scruple, and coming to the substance of the matter, I should consider it criminal selfishness to expose you to the many and various risks that our union would involve. I am indissolubly joined to a man of whom I know nothing personally, but of whom I hear nothing good—a man of no principles, and one who takes pleasure in scoffing at virtue. He may turn out a scoundrel; everything, in fact, is possible. I may pass altogether out of existence, and this fellow will claim you as his wife. The law would enforce his claim. I shall, during ten hours each day, be non-existent, so far as consciousness, conscience, will, and all that makes me myself, are concerned. During those hours you will be without a husband; and, however much in want of a protector, will have no one to appeal to. I cannot ask you to share a mutilated life like mine, and I will not. However sustained by love, you could not but be unhappy if subject to so unnatural a fate; day after day passing wearily by, and the same monotonous transitions never ceasing to take place; old age coming on, and this man, who in youth is so ill natured, will possibly by that time have developed into a spiteful, malicious creature, whose sole pleasure will consist in tormenting and persecuting you. Children to come, too, and what will they think? In fact, the thought of children settles the matter, even if I could consent to tag such a wretched and too probable future to your lot. No; I

will bear what has to be borne, and I will bear it alone. Selfishness I consider the worst of all vices, and I will struggle against it all my life. I look upon any *roué* who can think for others as better than any just man who thinks only of himself. My mind is made up, dearest,—for that you are to me, and always will be. Should I stand with you before the altar, vainly would the minister pronounce a blessing upon the man who had preferred himself to his duty. Short lived must be the happiness that comes from wickedness. A curse would be sown, and in due time yield its fruit of a well-deserved punishment.”

Very unnecessary such a long drawn out speech, when the simple monosyllable “No” would have answered all the purpose. Evidently the speaker was in want of buttresses for his resolution.

Edith wept. Anselm’s words had but increased her love for him. “I wish he were dead!” she vehemently exclaimed.

“You must wish nothing of the kind. Such a feeling would be wrong in either you or me. Indeed, I have no just cause of complaint against Hiram. He takes due care of our common body, and I can require no more; though his character I dislike, and his ways are not my ways. Well now, Edith, as I cannot offer the wedding ring, it will be necessary for you to turn your thoughts from me; and you would be wise to encourage the attentions of some just and honourable man with a view to marriage. I should like to see you happy, with your children around you. It would grieve me much if the feeling which

has sprung up between us two should cast any shadow upon your future life."

"Your advice most unaccountably reminds me of my aunt's senna-tea, and no doubt when swallowed will prove equally beneficial. Your idea, then, is that we are to leave off loving each other."

Anselm hesitated: he had, in fact, not meant anything of the kind. It was Edith who was to leave off, not himself. The crafty young lady had more than suspected as much.

"Is it, Anselm, as I have put it? This wholesome medicine for our diseased minds, you are not going to throw your portion to the dogs, I hope?"

"I see you are vexed, Edith; and no doubt my advice was not given at a very favourable moment; only I shall not have another opportunity. When quietly thought over it will, I hope, produce an effect."

"I thought Anselm Waveney was sincerity itself; and yet he cannot give a straightforward answer to an honest question. What I want to know is, if I abolish you, will you abolish me?"

"You are not looking at the matter in the right light, Edith. It will not hurt you or yours in any way, if I cherish you in my memory as a consolation in my misfortune. I cannot turn you out of my heart if I would; that's the long and short of it."

"And the same here; nor would I if I could. No other man shall replace you in my heart. Never! no, never!"

"But our cases are very different: as the natural sequence of affection is not for me, I shall love as

Petrarch loved Laura, in all innocence; though, unlike him, I shall worship my heart's idol in silence; but to you the glory of maternity and the joys of matronhood are open. No necessity, therefore, for solitude and barrenness. Many have entered the marriage state after a first love has fallen through. Many have done so who, by reason of their disappointment, were not able to offer their chosen companion anything more than respect and esteem. Experience shows that such unions are, at least, as happy as those founded on affection. Very often, indeed, a wiser choice is made under such circumstances; for the judgment is clearer."

"It sounds all very well, Anselm; but we women are silly things, that don't time our hearts by logic. I intend to go on loving, even though nothing can come of it. I have a right to do so while remaining single, but it would be wrong if I married; so that settles all questions concerning maternal glories and what not for me. I am vain enough to think that I have said something very logical; at any rate, I mean what I say, and you may talk for a month without producing any more effect on me than on my deaf old uncle. If I live till eighty, they shall write over my grave, 'Here lies an old woman who never loved but one man, and to him she remained faithful unto death. She was a very obstinate old woman, and the last words that came from her toothless mouth were, "Anselm, my first and only love."'"

Where was the spirit of maidenhood, that such words should be uttered? Evidently afar off, in com-

pany with Shame and his rouge-pot, for there were no blushes. A pause ensued, during which Anselm watched his companion, and he saw that her language was not of hysterical despair. Obstinacy, the strange obstinacy of the gentle, which endures when the inflexibility of the strong-willed has long faded away, was everywhere apparent. It looked composedly out of the large eyes, sat at ease on the soft cheeks, and ensconced itself snugly between the unclosed lips. "As it is to-day, so it shall be to-morrow, and for all the morrows, be they few or many." That was what the face said.

"Well, Edith," said Anselm, after his eyes had imbibed as much happiness as they could carry; "if such be the case, perhaps it will be as well for us to make the best of a bad business. We cannot marry, but we can, if you like, pass our lives in a perennial courtship. Lovers always, though spouses never. You remaining free, of course, to put an end to such relations whenever you think fit."

"I shall never put an end to them, Anselm," replied Edith.

"I am afraid we shall be subject to slander, which, of course, will press heavier upon you, as a woman, than upon me. Have you thought of that?"

"Should not wonder if they served me up for tea. I don't mind. So I have you, the old women are quite welcome to butter their muffins with my character."

Next evening Anselm put a betrothal ring upon Edith's finger, and thenceforth they were plighted lovers,

which also they remain to this day. Nobody's fault but their own, however; for Hiram evinced a willingness to make things pleasant, as the following letter from him shows:—

“DEAR SIR,—I find that you have certain relations with a Miss Lennox. A cousin of hers, named Herrington, spoke to me on the subject to-day, and evidently imagined that I was the man. He asked if the difficulty that existed had been removed. I can easily understand that the ‘difficulty’ is myself. Assuming a disposition on your part to meet me fairly, I am willing to consent to the affair coming off; but as the marriage of either of us would seem to involve the other remaining a bachelor, and there are other inconveniences to be considered, it is clear that I should be entitled to expect a substantial compensation. Mr. Herrington informed me that his cousin was worth twenty-five thousand pounds. I am prepared to accept ten thousand as the price of my acquiescence, and I think you will admit that my demand is far from exorbitant. A reply will oblige yours truly,

“HIRAM WAVENEY.

“A. WAVENEY, Esq.”

This amiable epistle was entrusted to Mrs. Waveney for delivery. “Tell him ‘No,’ mother,” said Anselm, handing it back to her.

“May I read?”

“Certainly.”

It was the first communication that had ever

passed between the brothers; therefore it was natural for their mother to feel curious. Having read, she asked,—

“You will not accept his offer, then, Anselm?”

“Decidedly not, little lady. I refused to entertain the idea when my resolution meant a life-long separation from my darling. Now that we are both perfectly happy and contented, I feel no disposition to take a step so full of peril.”

“But it seems to me that Hiram by this letter threatens to get married himself. Your position then would be very painful in many ways; and particularly your relations with Edith could not go on, for the outside world would consider she was keeping company with a married man.”

“Are you then taken in by his craft, mother? He knows very well that he could not marry without my consent. How could he? Assuming, however, that he did, it is not certain that I would give up Edith. Her happiness would be my sole consideration, of course; but I might find that it affected her less to be under a cloud than to be separated from me. I would take every means to clear her reputation, and would publish a statement of the case, attested by you, in all the papers. However, this is dealing with the ghost of a ghost. I have no fears at all upon the matter; for Hiram, I take it, is very far from being a fool.”

“You may be right, Anselm. Now as to his letter, don’t you think it would be mere common courtesy to write a polite refusal?”

"Shall hold no communication with the fellow at all, little lady."

"It's a great pity you should not be on friendly terms with each other. He writes courteously. Perhaps if you met him in a similar spirit, a good understanding might come about between you both after a time. His character might change altogether for the better under the influence of fraternal feelings. It would be so delightful to me to see something like harmony between my children. Come, Anselm, as a favour to your mother, do write."

"Sorry to disoblige you, little lady, but fancy I had better not. This would be my style,—'Sir, your letter proves what I have always suspected, namely, that you are a blackguard. Any further communications upon this or any other subject will be returned unopened.' Doubt whether such a reply would inaugurate a particularly harmonious state of things."

"It's a sad pity; and I am sure he will be much annoyed."

He was "A d—d conceited prig! Why, a costermonger would show better manners. Serve him right if I went and married somebody." Such was Hiram's comment when Anselm's message, somewhat improved, was delivered by Mrs. Waveney. However, he did not go and marry anybody.

It was a short time after this interlude that Edith for the first time met Hiram. The latter was sitting at breakfast one Sunday morning when he said, good-humouredly for him,—

"I should like to have a spy at this Lennox girl, old lady."

"What for?"

"Curiosity. Nothing in that, I hope, to make you suspicious."

"I am not suspicious, Hiram."

"Glad to hear that you have such a good opinion of me. I shall take a stroll to the church this morning. Herrington said she was in that line. What kind of party is she—tall or short, fair or dark? Just a few items to know her by."

"You don't want to annoy her in any way, Hiram?"

"Of course not. What should I want to annoy her for?"

"Well, you and Anselm are, unfortunately, on such bad terms that I am obliged to be very careful. You will find her *carte* in my album, next to his."

There were portraits of both men therein. It did not require Mrs. Waveney's eyes to distinguish one from the other.

"Ah, I might have thought of that," taking up the album. He lingered awhile over Anselm's likeness. "A sanctified-looking bloke as ever was." He had made similar observations on previous occasions. The counter opinion was not more complimentary—

"Looks like a man who never did an unselfish action in his life."

Said Hiram,—“And this is the young party, eh? Of course I'm no judge, but she seems to be a very tidy bit of muslin indeed.”

"Yes," replied Mrs. Waveney, "Miss Lennox is considered a very handsome young lady."

"Well, I shall just go out for a smoke, and take the church on my way back," which he did; and Edith in the evening gave in her report of the meeting.

"I saw Mr. Hiram Waveney this morning, Anselm."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, just as I left church. He was lounging outside the gate. Evidently he came to look at me."

"Humph!"

"He bowed, and I bowed. Then he said, 'Good morning.'"

"Did he, though? Like his impertinence, I must say."

"Yes, wasn't it? However, I replied, 'Good morning,' and hurried away. Could not help answering him, could I, Anselm?"

"Of course not, dear. Well, and did you consider him very much like me?"

"Like enough for a brother; but I could never have taken him for you."

"Come, I am glad to hear that."

"The only resemblance was in the shape of the features: everything else was different, especially about the eyes and mouth. And what a disagreeable expression he has! I should take him to be a very hard-hearted man."

"Which is just what he is. Sold up David Cartwright, his school friend, for a debt, and was quite

brutal to the poor fellow's wife when she went to beg for a little time. Any one could see, too, she was in the last stage of pregnancy."

"Oh, how dreadful! What a bad man he must be. You get the credit of it sometimes, I suppose?"

"Sometimes; but not often, I am thankful to say. What with the difference of our names and habits, most persons imagine us to be two *bond fide* brothers."

"You do not dress the same, I noticed."

"No; his style would not suit me at all. Can't think where he picks his things up: in Petticoat Lane, by the look of them. I am not very particular, but a man ought to be at least neatly attired; and even if a little taste be displayed, I do not see any harm in it."

"But how can you tell how he looks when you have never seen him?"

"Why, you little goose, don't I find myself wearing his things of an evening, when I re-appear on the scene? Never leaves his business coat on me, though. That's always locked up. Thinks, no doubt, I should steal his pocket-book."

"What nasty ways! But was he always like that? And how was it when you were boys together?"

"For a long time I did not know of his existence. I used to ask my mother what became of me all day, and she said I should know about it when I was twelve years of age. On my twelfth birthday she told me I had a brother named Hiram, with whom I changed places during the day, the same as he did

with me at night; but I was not to let any one else know. She gave me sixpence a week pocket-money, and said Hiram was to have the same. I was pleased at first, and used to give our old Mary buttons and marbles for Hiram; but nothing ever came from him for me, and I got tired of it. I was disgusted, too, with his meanness in hiding his toys, when I always left mine out for him to play with. And that was not the worst, for he used to steal the pennies which I left in my pockets. I informed Mary that in my opinion Hiram was a thief and a sneak, and she said so he was."

"I should have agreed with Mary. But, Anselm, how do you feel on coming to? Is it like waking from sleep?"

"No. The feeling is as if I had gone away somewhere and come back again. That's why I asked what became of me. I knew other people did not go away, because they talked about what they had done during the day, whom they had seen, and so forth. The winter was the worst time for me,—no daylight for months together; but it was glorious when summer came, with its sunshiny mornings and hours of daylight before sunset."

• "I suppose you feel the same now, and will be glad when the long evenings come again."

"Yes, I shall be pleased; but I have a sun of my own now, and it shines just as brightly in winter as in summer." Whereupon the golden halo of said sun came remarkably near the speaker's face; or, not to put too fine a point on it, the compliment was paid

for—in quietness, though, and with cool veins—for the hot foolishness which precedes possession had disappeared. They were, indeed, on quite matrimonial terms; so much so, that Anselm did not scruple on occasions to make use of Edith's fortune—for others, though, not for himself. For instance, he said to her one evening,—

“Edith, I come as a suppliant.”

“Yes, Anselm dear.”

“I want to lend my friend, Harry Hewitt, a thousand pounds. He has lately set up for himself, but is dreadfully crippled for want of capital. The sum I mentioned would enable him to develop his business speedily. I don't think there is very much risk. He is an honest fellow, and not one to make ducks and drakes of the money. He shall pay you five per cent.”

Edith was only too glad to place her purse at Anselm's disposal.

Well, so they go on, and happiness is with them. As they walk or sit together of an evening, all things seem well, and neither of them sighs for the grosser forms of love. Linked together in a peaceful and innocent union, spouses in the spirit, and debtors to each other in all lawful tokens of affection, their communion presents every aspect of unity. Companionship such as theirs suggests no feeling of pity, but rather of envy; and it may be that some who have been joined in the temple of Hymen will look wistfully at the spectacle of these spoiled children of Time passing their lives in a garden of roses.

Naturally the lovers did not escape calumny ; but even this easily endured misfortune did not last long, for their story oozed out ; and, however the uncharitable may affect to shake their heads, all persons of good will in the Waveney and Lennox circles look with interest upon the affectionate couple. Amongst such, wishes are often expressed for Hiram's speedy demise ; but that individual shows no signs whatever of going off the scene. He is understood to be prosperous in business, and to have a satisfactory banker's account. The waste of time involved in going from Malham to London and back every day annoys him excessively, but has to be endured ; for Anselm steadily refuses to sacrifice his evening walks. ' D—d selfish of him ! ' says Hiram.

THE WHITE LILY.

"THE White Lily," said Von Glehn, "is for the pure, —namely, virgins; therefore not for us."

"Speak for yourself," said Jackson.

"How is it obtained?" asked Dyke.

Hermann von Glehn was a young man with a woman's head of golden hair and small aquiline features. He loved virtue, but in the abstract rather than in the concrete.

James Jackson was a youth with brown hair, merry blue eyes, and a round chubby face. He had as yet restrained his lips from the rotten tamarinds of vice.

Sydney Dyke, M.P., was an elderly man, who had pursued and found wealth. His hard, rugged face was lit in a sombre way by intelligence; but there was little sign of interior illumination in his small grey eyes. He was indeed of the world, worldly.

Asked Mr. Dyke, "How is it obtained?"

"It comes to those who long, and who have the qualification I have mentioned."

"And the maiden with the silver hair? You have seen her, you say?"

"Yes, often. Her breath is cold, and her eyes shine like diamonds. She and her lover, when she has one, are never far apart, and yet never seem to meet until the right moment arrives. There is apparently both attraction and repulsion at work until then."

"And you actually saw her kiss your friend, Von der Weide?"

"Yes, she kissed him, and he died. He had sought her over the four continents. She also had sought him. They met on Mount Snowdon. I was climbing up and saw young Von der Weide with the White Lily in his hand. The maiden appeared coming up another part; on reaching the top she stood still. He hesitated, and she turned as if to go, then he ran after her. She put her arms round his neck, kissed him, and he fell dead. I hastened to the spot. She was closing his eyes. I said to her sternly, 'Maiden, that was a dear kiss.' She looked at me coldly, but made no reply. I continued, 'You must excuse my taking an interest in my friend and countryman. Do you usually slay your lovers in that way?' She still kept silent, and I said impatiently, 'Do you not see that he is dead?—dead in the green time of life, and you have murdered him.' She spoke, and her breath entering my lungs almost choked me, it was so icy cold. She said, 'He was pure, hence he sought me; he ceases not to live: it is you that are dead.'" Saying which she kissed poor Von der Weide as he lay upon the ground, and departed. I had him buried in a little village church.

yard at the foot of Snowdon, and followed him to the grave."

Von Glehn, having finished, looked gloomy, and throwing his cigar aside went away.

Jackson waited a little longer, and then got up to depart. On taking leave he said, "I will seek this maiden, uncle."

"What are you talking about, James?" said Mr. Dyke. "For goodness' sake do not think of such a thing. You are my heir, and will come into my property some day."

"I will seek her, uncle," said the youth, earnestly, "and will die pure." But that very night James Jackson lost his qualification.

After the two young men had left, Mr. Dyke remained immersed in thought, and so continued for hours. He should have gone down to the House to ask the Home Secretary a question of which notice had been given ; but, instead of doing so, he sat brooding in his study, and all night long he stayed there spurning sleep. In the morning he called on his nephew, who said, with a vain attempt to be gay, "I have changed my mind, uncle: it was only a foolish idea of the moment."

Mr. Dyke returned home, had some luggage packed up, and went out of town. It was the height of the session, but he could not bend his mind to politics. For him they had suddenly lost their interest. Retiring to his country house, he spent his waking hours in constant meditation ; and this went on for three or four weeks. The silver-haired maiden was

ever in his thoughts. He wondered if any one was then seeking her. According to Von Glehn, she never had more than one lover at a time. It was, indeed, strange she should at any time have one, considering the qualification demanded and the price to be paid for her kiss. An intense longing to see the maiden took possession of him, and daily grew more fervent. One day he was walking along a country lane, picturing to himself Von der Weide advancing to receive the fatal caress. "Really," said he, "if I were worthy, I believe I would seek her too." Just at this moment he came up to a three-year old that was tottering along in the rear of its nurse. The little one looked at him, and said,—

"Oh, what a booful flower!"

Much surprised, Mr. Dyke cast his eyes down, and there saw in his own right hand a white lily.

"Ah," said he, with a quiet smile, "is it so? Then I will certainly seek her, and she may do her worst."

There was no watery emotion running out of his eyes: he had never been a sentimentalist; and there was no pompous farewell to the dreams of ambition. He simply put his worldliness aside, as a coat no longer fit to be worn.

Light-hearted and innocently humorous, he said to himself, "Let me see, I am turned fifty; wonder if she ever had such an elderly lover before." He settled all his affairs, made his will, applied for the Chiltern Hundreds, and began his wanderings.

It was about two years after Sydney Dyke's dis-

appearance from the walks of society that Von Glehn, being at Echuca, on the Murray, in Australia, came upon the silver-haired maiden. "Very curious," he thought, "that I should see her so often. Looks as if there were some sympathy between us. Dare say I should soon have found her if I had gone in for it, and been dead long ago." Then addressing her,—
"Whom are you seeking now, fair maid?"

"A man," she replied, "past the prime of life, but he bears the White Lily."

"All right," said he, mirthfully. "If I see him about, I'll tell him you are on the look-out."

She went away, following the track of the river northwards; and about five hours afterwards Von Glehn saw Sydney Dyke, the latter carrying in his hand the flower which betokened his object.

"Holloa, Dyke!" cried the German, "are you looking for a pair of diamond bright eyes?"

"Yes; I am following in the footsteps of Von der Weide."

"What an extraordinary thing!—a man of your age, and with your place in the world. What fine prospects, too, to give up! Why, I have heard people say that you might soon have become an Under Secretary of State. What a sacrifice!"

"Cannot claim any merit of that kind. Only feel surprised that I ever pursued such bubbles. Am unable to recall my then state of mind so as to understand what there was to tempt me."

"Political power may have lost its charms, but there are many other pleasures in life."

"None equal to the seal of purity, the kiss of the silver-haired maiden."

"But look at the price."

"The price, Von Glehn, is ridiculously small in my case. Why, it's a one-sided bargain altogether, my boy," said Dyke, laughing in his innocent gaiety.

"Well, I cannot help hoping, for your sake, that the fatal meeting will not take place too soon."

"Too soon? That it cannot. I only wish the moment had now arrived. But have you seen her lately?"

"Yes, a few hours ago only; and she went up the river side in that direction."

"Ah, then, I must follow. Fare you well, Von Glehn."

Years passed away, and still the restless German continued to wander. Occasionally he met Dyke, which generally meant seeing the maiden also. The two were always very near to each other, but never met. "Ah," said the traveller, "this is a longer wooing than Von der Weide's."

At last, namely, in the latter part of 1871, Von Glehn, happening to be in Seville, paid, according to his wont, visits to the various churchyards. Looking at the resting-places of the dead afforded a temporary peace to his feverish spirit. Going through a graveyard outside the town, his attention was arrested by a tomb on which was inscribed in English: "In memory of Sydney Dyke, born 5th January, 1809, died 10th September, 1871." While he was gazing earnestly at this inscription, a beautiful dark-eyed

girl, apparently about sixteen years of age, came by. She stopped at the tomb, and looked at it intently. Von Glehn felt a chill come over him. "She evidently," he thought, "knows something of poor Dyke. Surely, after a faithful search of so many years, he could not have at last turned aside and fixed his wishes on this handsome girl." The suspicion caused Von Glehn much pain, for he had always loved what was good, notwithstanding the many sacrifices he had offered up in the temple of vice. Addressing the girl, he asked,—

"Do you know anything of the man who is sleeping there?"

"Yes," she replied; "he died through kissing the cold lady."

"Oh! do tell me about it. What kind of lady was she, do you know?"

"She had very light hair, which glistened like silver, and her face was quite white; and such strange eyes! I could not tell you what colour; but they looked like two bright stars."

"You saw her, then?"

"Yes, and I saw the old gentleman. He was not so very old, but had grey hair. He asked me if he might pick an orange—it was in our orchard—because he was thirsty. I said, certainly he might; and I did not feel at all afraid of him, he had such a kind look; and oh! he had such a beautiful lily in his hand. Well, he went on a little, and then the lady came by. She drew near, and made me feel so cold—colder than ever I felt before. She said to me,

‘My child,’ she was only a young lady too, but that’s what she called me—‘my child, have you seen any one pass by here with a white lily in his hand?’ I said, ‘Oh, yes—he’s just gone by—a grey-haired gentleman.’ Then she went after him, and I followed on behind. He heard her footsteps, and turned round; then he trembled very much—not as if he were afraid, you know; but he seemed so very happy. I heard him say, ‘At last, then, my long search is at an end.’ She would not go to him, but stayed where she was; so he came up to her, and said, ‘Loved one, whom I have sought for so many years, kiss me.’ She put her arms round his neck and kissed him. Then I screamed, for he fell to the ground, and was quite still, and his face was as pale as hers. She closed his eyes, looked at him, kissed him again, and went away. I ran in to tell my father, and we came to the gentleman, but he was quite dead. Papa found a letter in his pocket, saying who were to be sent to in case he should be found dead; so, you see, he thought he should die.”

“Yes, he knew he might die at any time.”

“Did you know him, then, sir?”

“Yes; he was a friend of mine.”

“Oh! what a pity you could not have been here to follow him. His nephew came over—such a nasty man—winked at me, and wanted to kiss me, but I wouldn’t let him. Then he said he should, and I said he shouldn’t. He tried to make me, and I ran away. But did you know the lady, too, sir?”

“I have often seen her.”

"I said it was very cruel of her to kill him for wanting to kiss her ; but papa said it was not, and that at one time he intended to kiss her himself"

"Did he indeed say so?" asked Von Glehn, much interested.

"Yes, and he looked very sad. I told him it was a good thing he did not, as he would have died too. He answered, 'A good thing for you, but not for me. I don't know what he meant. And will this lady kiss any one that wants her to?'"

"No ; only good men. She would not let me, because I am not good."

"You don't look very bad," said his companion, innocently ; "but do they all die when she kisses them?"

"Yes, all of them."

"Ah ! I am glad she did not ask me to, then, for I shouldn't have known anything about it."

"And don't you want to die?" he asked, laughing at the child, for her manners bespoke her such ; though girls of her age are nowadays generally women, knowing all about everything, and especially about men.

"Oh ! no," she replied, with undisguised horror, and crossing herself earnestly.

At this moment a tall gentleman, of well-bred appearance, came up to the spot. He was evidently the girl's father, and he seemed to view her companion with suspicion. This was not unnatural, for Von Glehn, always good-looking, was now a splendidly handsome man, in the prime of life. The too eager

and somewhat frivolous expression that marked him at the time when this story commenced, had been replaced by a dignified and meditative air, which set off his aquiline features to the best advantage.

Said Von Glehn to the new-comer, "Mr. Sydney Dyke, who lies there, was a friend of mine. Your daughter—for such I presume this young lady is—has been kind enough to furnish me with the particulars of his death."

'As you were a friend of his, sir, it may not much matter; but, Juanita, you should not be too free in communicating what you know about that.'

Miss Juanita pouted very much at this, and then said, "This gentleman knows the lady, papa"; which certainly was rather Jesuitical on her part, seeing that she had furnished her information before being made acquainted with that fact.

"Do you, indeed, sir?" said the gentleman, evidently very much interested. "Not one of the seekers, I suppose?" he added, smilingly.

"No," answered Von Glehn, mournfully. "I wish I had been."

"Ah! I was once. Three years I sought her, sir, and then was unfortunate enough to be taken prisoner by the black eyes of this young lady's mamma. Strange to say, I saw the pale-faced maiden just as I was coming out of church, after the marriage. It may have been fancy, but she seemed to look at me very reproachfully; and I would have given anything to have had my lily back again in my hand."

"It would be presuming too much, I suppose, to ask at what stage you lost the flower, and how?"

"I was walking through a park, and a young girl, my future wife, was sitting on a stool. There was an open book lying on another seat. She took up the volume, and, looking at me hesitatingly, said, 'You seem very tired, sir; will you not rest a while?' I had been walking far, and was glad of the opportunity. Perhaps, too, I was lured by her sweetly musical voice. I sat down, and she said, 'What a beautiful lily you have there, sir!' I replied, 'Not more beautiful than she who sees it.' That very instant the lily disappeared. I was astounded, for I had really meant nothing more than a compliment. She saw that it was gone, and said, 'Why, what have you done with it?' I answered, that I had thrown it away; than which, alas! nothing could be truer. My misery at that moment it is impossible to describe, and for days afterwards I was simply devoured by grief. However, having lost her I had been seeking, there was nothing left but to win the sweet girl who had been the unconscious cause of my misfortune; but it was a poor consolation. Yes, sir, that was how I failed."

"So easily lost!" murmured Von Glehn. "Poor Dyke! how faithful he must have been during his long search of twelve years."

The two men had some further conversation, in the course of which it appeared that Juanita's father was an English merchant settled at Seville, and his name was Wynne. He invited the other to his

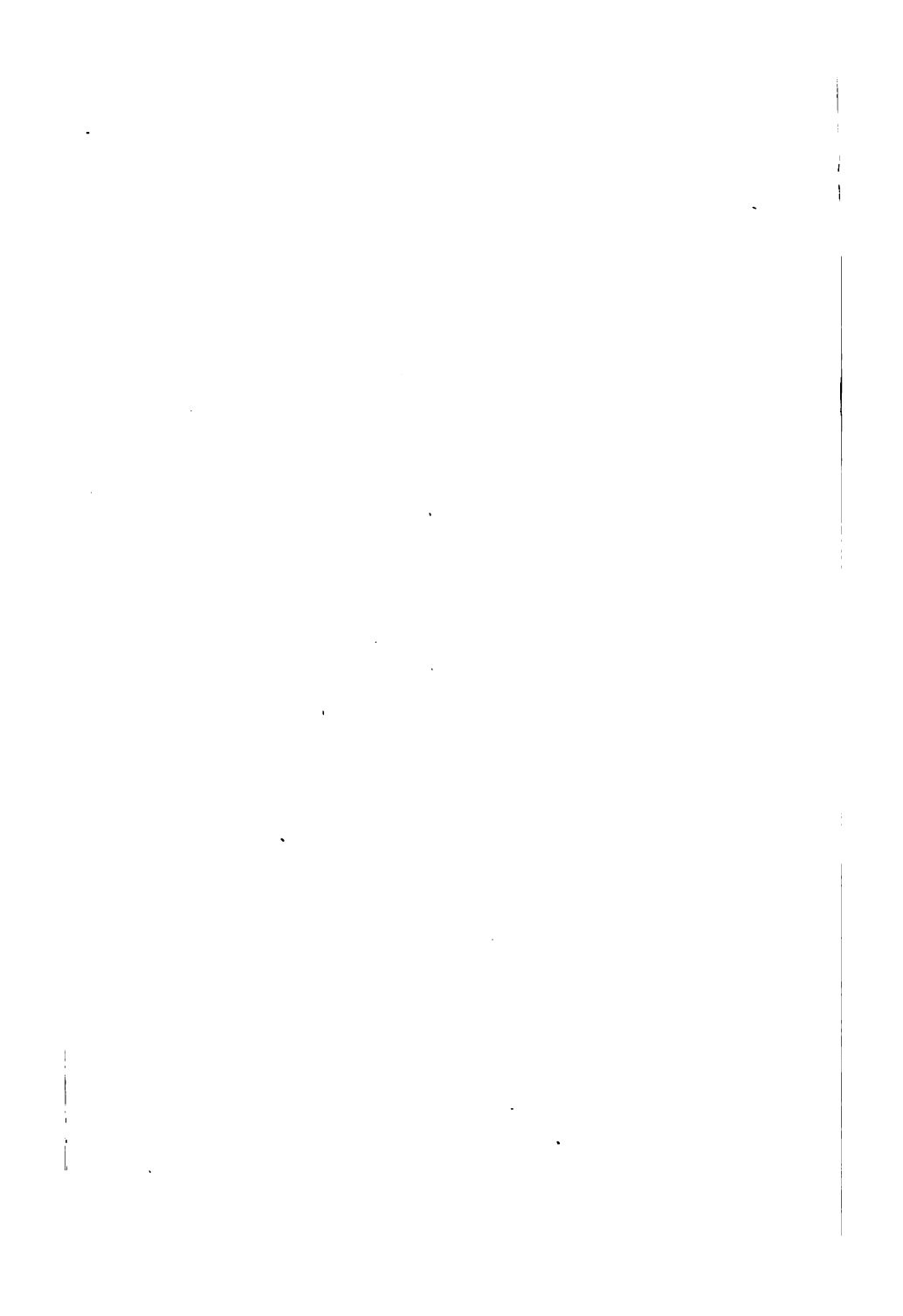
house, an invitation willingly accepted. Von Glehn remained three months at Seville. He did so as a student of character. He wished to find out whether Juanita's simplicity was genuine or put on. Apparently his researches in that respect were satisfactory; for, after a flying tour through Spain, he returned, and stayed three or four months longer, at the end of which time he made Miss Juanita an offer of marriage, no doubt with a view to the further study of her character.

Mr. Wynne was very unwilling to part with his daughter. He said that, while she was with him he could fancy her mother still alive; just such another black-eyed baby she was. However, it was discovered that the young lady's affections had become very much entangled over the matter, so her father gave way. At first Von Glehn intended taking his bride with him to Cologne, where he resided when in Germany; but, on reflection, the idea occurred to him, why should he carry her entirely away from her father? A wanderer all his life, what did it matter to him where he settled down? He accordingly communicated to Mr. Wynne his intention of abiding permanently at Seville, and the look of pleasure which this intimation called up was ample reward for the generous purpose.

So Hermann von Glehn lives at Seville; and there are three children in the house now, he says, namely, Juanita and the two "bits of red rubbish," to use his own expression, which she has presented him with. "They will do nicely for you to play at

ball with," he says ; and she takes the same view, the last comer being at the present time in especial requisition for that purpose.

Since his marriage Von Glehn has not seen the silver-haired maiden. Juanita fervently hopes she will not come that way any more, and evidently fears lest "the cold lady" should have a mind to kiss the babies.



THE VALE OF TEARS.

“YES,” said Vallha, “misery, like a gloomy tyrant, reigns over the children of men.”

Replied his mother, the patient Myrrha, “Nobility comes from suffering.” Then a ghastly, sick look spread over her face, for her bosom throbbed with agonizing pain. Cancer gnawed there night and day, but the brave spirit refused to murmur.

Came now in Zorah to prepare the simple supper. Bread and water, with a few green herbs, were all that could be afforded. Very beautiful was Zorah; but her hands were coarse with constant work, for her ailing brother and afflicted mother had to be supported.

“Child, you look tired,” said Myrrha. “You have scarcely sat down since early morn.”

“Spring is the time for work, little mother. I must sow, or else shall not reap.”

“And for all your labours what will the sullen soil yield?” asked Vallha.

“It is not fertile, truly; but my rent is low, and

if Nature prove kind we shall be secure against the next hard winter."

"So scornful is existence, sister. Graciously it offers us itself as the reward of unremitting toil."

"And something more—communion with those we love."

"Yes, we have companions in misfortune."

"Sympathy with whose sorrows lightens our own. Moreover, we share each other's joys."

"Which are few."

"And, therefore, the more precious."

"We live, nevertheless, in darkness and desolation."

"But hope raises aloft its cheerful torch."

"And, like moths, we fly into the flames, burning our wings. Too late we find out our mistake, and, fluttering to the ground, writhe in agony until we perish. Useless is it to cheat ourselves. We may dream, but shall always awaken to bitterness. Each man's life is a cup full of gall, with death as the suitable dregs. I could wish my drinking were over: it would be better with you then, Zorah."

"Not so," said the maiden, gently. "I do not want to lose those I love."

After supper Zorah assisted her brother into their little garden. He liked looking at the stars, far away as they were from the vale of tears. For a time the sky was shrouded by clouds, but they melted away, and he looked eagerly upwards. Suddenly he called out, "Zorah, Zorah, behold the golden lights of the beautiful temple."

She eagerly ran out to see the sight, for seldom was the Temple of Tranquillity visible in the dark valley.

"How happy they must be up there!" said Vallha, sighing; "do you not envy them, sister?"

"Yes," she replied; "I cannot but envy those who have found peace. Yet they say that love is unknown up there."

"It is forbidden by the laws of the great Rama. Tradition has it that he used to preach against all the passions, but especially against love, which he considered was the great tap-root of human misery."

"I should have been among the unbelievers," said Zorah, smiling.

"He could find few to accept his doctrines, and ultimately, when very old, withdrew to yon mountain, where, with his followers, he has dwelt these many centuries. At rare intervals they have been joined by others. I wish I knew how they managed to qualify themselves."

"By much labour and suffering, you may be sure," observed Zorah, sagaciously.

"No doubt. The ordeal is indeed said to be so severe that, though thousands have tried to make themselves fit, scarcely any succeeded. All the others perished. But those who were successful, how glorious their lot, secure now from all unhappiness, and even from the crowning misfortune of death!"

"But they are forbidden to love," said Zorah, and the reflection mitigated her envy.

The Temple of Tranquillity was situated on the

crest of a snow-covered mountain, and within its precincts lived the Votaries of Peace. Apart from and above all human anxiety were they—a quiet and calm-eyed brotherhood, who had no desires. Below them was the dark and mournful valley where tearful toilers dwelt, where Peace was all unknown, and Death was king.

On the very night when Vallha was gazing upwards with envy, Agathos, the youngest priest of the temple, was looking down upon the valley. Therein he violated the laws by which the Votaries of Peace were bound—the wise laws of the hoary-headed Rama, he who, two thousand years before, had emancipated himself from the fate of mortality, and whom all the brothers daily saluted as he opened the temple gates. Beautiful was the fane as the golden lights played on its white marble walls, but Agathos continued looking down. He gazed for hours, and longed to be among the mortals who laboured below—among the tearful inhabitants of the sombre valley. His yearnings could not be restrained, and in the morning Agathos was not with those who saluted Rama, for he had descended the mountain.

“Mother,” cried Zorah, running into her cottage in the middle of the day, “some bread, please; quick, while I fill this jug with water. There is a young man in my field dying of starvation.”

Myrrha produced the bread, and the girl rushed off again.

“Drink,” she said to Agathos, for he it was, “and then you will be able to eat.”

He complied with her invitation, and then took the bread. Eating and drinking were strange to him, for the Votaries of Peace, being superior to hunger as to all other cravings, did not require food; and it was two hundred years since Agathos, then a very young man, had passed through the terrible ordeal which gave him a place amongst the followers of Rama. Six days had elapsed since the votary's descent from the mountain, and it had been a time of great suffering to him. The tranquillity he had deserted seemed inexpressibly delightful when looked back upon, and deep dejection took possession of his mind. Then all sorts of cares came upon him. How should he live; at what employ himself? The fear of death, too, that great misfortune from which he had been exempt, weighed heavily upon his spirit. Still he did not regret his rash act; for was he not amongst those he wanted to love, whose sorrows and joys he might share? Yes, he might love and be loved; the very idea seemed to fill his veins with honey.

Meanwhile he got very hungry, and, being so, naturally asked for food; but, alas! there seemed to be much selfishness about, and his appeals were rejected with scorn. Feeling very ill, he turned into a field to die. He saw a maiden working at a short distance off, but, after his late experience, did not imagine it would be of any use asking her for something to eat. However, she noticed him lying on

a bank, and came towards him. His heart thrilled at the sight of her compassionate eyes.

"Are you ill, sir?" she asked, in sweet musical tones, that filled him with exquisite pleasure.

"Yes," he replied, "I am very hungry, and no one will give me any food: I shall soon die."

Then she ran like a swift fawn into her house, and came out again with the bread and water.

Well pleased was Zorah to see him eat, and to note that the colour began to come into his face.

"Have you fasted long?" she asked, when he had finished.

"Six days," he answered.

"Oh! how dreadful!" she exclaimed in horror.

"You must be very weak. Do you live near?"

"I have no home," was the simple reply.

"No home?—nor friends?"

"No, not yet; but I hope to make some, if I can get any work. Do you know of any one who would employ me? I do not want to be idle."

Very extraordinary it seemed to Zorah, this handsome, noble young man, who looked like a prince, wanting work. The one labourer she employed had left her for a better situation. Hesitating very much, she said, "I am in want of some one to till this field; but you would be capable of much more profitable employment than that. I am very poor, and could give but low wages."

"I should be very grateful," said Agathos, "if you would employ me. I am quite willing to work hard, and to take what you usually give your labourers."

He was a scion of a royal house at the time when he qualified himself, two centuries since, to become one of the mountain brotherhood. However, he had nothing of pride, and was perfectly content to earn his daily bread by the sweat of his brow, like the other inhabitants of the valley.

So Agathos served Zorah, and proved the best labourer she ever had. Early dawn saw him at work, and the shades of evening alone drove him from the field. Faithfully he followed his mistress's every instruction; and truly he had much to learn, for knowledge of human things was not encouraged by the wise ruler of the mountain. The maiden herself also laboured unremittingly; for those she loved depended for their maintenance upon the produce of her field.

Myrrha often came out to see them at work, and she smiled at certain suspicious appearances that began to be observable. The sufferer had conceived an almost maternal affection for the young man. She felt sure that he must have fallen from a high estate; and yet how nobly industrious he was! This she admired greatly: here was a brave spirit, such as she could sympathize with. Looking at the handsome couple, she had wished for certain things to happen, and now there were signs. Zorah's eyes told tales that could not be mistaken, and the subtlest hint would bring rich blushes on her cheeks. Full well Myrrha saw that the maiden's heart had entered into captivity.

For a time there was no reciprocation; hence the

tender anguish of unrequited affection; but such an unnatural state of things was not to last long. Strange indeed would it have been if Zorah, more beautiful every day as she became under the influence of the master-passion, should have loved on unloved. Soon Agathos became conscious of mysterious sensations, though what their meaning might be was for a season hidden from him. At length, however, he awoke to the knowledge that Zorah had become something more than the mistress who paid him his wages. A great, though very sweet, terror took possession of him. Of all the passions none was more fatal, according to Rama's teachings, than the love of man for woman. True, Agathos was no longer subject to the laws of the mountain; but his reverence for the white-headed sage had been great, and it seemed almost impious to go against his great doctrine, "Love is at the root of human misery; but especially love for women is most fatally destructive"; and it was indeed one of the essential qualifications of those who aspired to peace that they should never have been subject to the disastrous passion. However, the young husbandman did not long resist his fate. He was not able to, in fact. Love was confessed on both sides, and Myrrha was very happy.

"Now, my sweet one," she said to her daughter, "my wishes are satisfied. The thought that my Zorah has found one worthy to possess her, consoles me for the sufferings which are drawing to an end."

She, indeed, died soon after the young couple were united, and, in dying, blessed them. The bridegroom

looked with awe on the face of the dead ; such would be his own doom—he who once had attained immortality.

So Agathos was numbered among the toilers of the valley, and his life was the same as theirs. Grievings and joys came to him as to other mortals—many of the former, very few of the latter, for such is the lot of man ; yet the husband and wife, blessed in their mutual affection, knew how to endure, and were brave. Vallha, however, still moaned, still wished that he were one of the possessors of peace ; and one night, when the golden lights of the Temple of Tranquillity were visible, he cried out, as once before,—

“ Oh ! how happy they must be up there ! Do you not envy them, Agathos ? ”

“ No,” said his brother-in-law, “ I do not envy them ; for love is unknown in the precincts of that temple.”

Then he told Zorah, for the first time, how he had been one of the Votaries of Peace, and had descended from the mountain.

She listened with wonder, and asked,—

“ But do you never wish you had kept with them ? ”

“ No, dearest,” he replied, “ never. I am well satisfied to be among my brother-men, sharing their joys and sorrows. I have you and the children, whom I love—treasures such as Rama, for all his wisdom, never possessed. Let who will long to be among the inhabitants of the mountain ; to me their cold peace and loveless immortality are in no ways enviable.”

Thus was it with Agathos and Zorah ; working together and loving each other, they possessed their souls in patience. The hungry were never turned away from their door ; the sorrowful never asked for their sympathy in vain. Such happiness as the dark valley afforded was theirs, and, indeed, is never denied to the unselfish.

But Rama and his followers continued to abide on the snow-clad mountain.

HER CHOICE.

"Who is that strange-looking man?" asked Columbia Elson of her cousin, Harry Gover. "I mean the one with the thin, dark face and black eyes. See, he is looking at us."

"That is Rael Orma."

"What is he?"

"Don't know, and never found any one who did."

"Well, his country, then?"

"That also is wrapped in obscurity. I asked him once, and he said 'I have none.'"

"What an inscrutable being!"

"Yes; and quaint tales are told about him. They say that he seeks his lady love, and—"

"Not the kind of man one would wish to have for a lover."

"Well, whoever she is, it shall be bad for her and hers; so take care you don't go in for him."

"What a dreadful creature! But what will he do to them?"

"Every one she has kissed, whether man, woman,

or child, shall come to grief. So says my Teutonic friend, Stein, who pretends to know all about Orma."

"But you don't believe that, do you?"

"Well, I hope I'm not quite such a fool as I look; but you should hear Stein. According to him, our dark friend has been carrying on the same game for several generations."

"How absurd!"

"Yes, isn't it? I should say the fellow can't be more than thirty years of age. But come, are you game to be introduced to him?"

"Yes; I should like it very much."

The introduction took place, and Mr. Orma looked at Miss Elson in a way that made her feel rather uncomfortable.

He said, "You are not unlike your aunt Maude."

This particular relative had lately died. Columbia had never seen her. Report had it that she was a stern woman, who lived in entire seclusion. She was the last of her family, and had survived her brother (Columbia's father) eighteen years. The young lady, at the period reached, was in the last year of her teens.

"Were you acquainted with my aunt?" asked Columbia.

"Yes; I knew her when she was of your age."

His listener stared. Miss Maude Elson, at the time of her decease, was forty-five years of age.

"You must have been very young."

"No, I was not."

"This is getting mysterious," whispered Harry, gaily.

"And did you know my father likewise, sir?"

"I saw him once; it was a few minutes before he and his two brothers got on board their yacht, the morning they were drowned."

Columbia turned pale: she was far from being a timid girl, but the statement suggested something out of the natural, considering what she had been told. She now recollected having heard strange rumours concerning aunt Maude. There was, at any rate, the fact of that lady having survived her numerous brothers and sisters, as also that she had no friends.

Harry Gover now interposed. "You have come from Vienna, I believe, Orma?"

"Yes."

"Did you happen to see Herr Wilhelm Stein? I understood that you were acquainted with him."

"Yes; he was in the company of a young Englishman, named Stephen Gould."

Columbia started, as she heard the name, and a blush came out on her cheeks.

Continued Orma,—“Mr. Gould, strangely enough, committed suicide that same night, by blowing his brains out.”

A piercing shriek was heard, followed by a fall, and the ladies present rushed to Columbia, for she had fainted away. Harry Gover looked distressed, and yet not displeased. The death of Gould gave him a chance. He had feared rivalry in that quarter, but did not know matters had gone so far. Seeing that Columbia was coming to, he ran for water, poured some out in a glass, and affectionately handed

it to her. Rael Orma looked on, and seemed to meditate.

Columbia Elson thought it would take her a long time getting over that sad affair of poor Stephen Gould. She was mistaken: though tender enough to have proceeded to kisses, it was little more than a school-girl fantasy. This she discovered when the honourable and pure-minded Paul Comyng came across her path. Then she loved in real earnest; and if this fact caused pain, consolation was at hand. Mr. Comyng was not a man to play fast and loose with the hearts of women. Why, then, did his eyes continually rest on Columbia Elson? She knew very well how that was. Moreover, Paul Comyng was not bound over to her in looks only: he had said things that, coming from him, meant whatever she chose they should mean; and she chose that they should mean a good deal. All this of course was most delightful, and a week or two of luscious visions passed by; but life is not made after that pattern. Certain events had been taking place which it behoved Columbia Elson to take notice of. One or two of her little nephews and nieces died off. Anon, various strange maladies began to afflict her brothers and sisters. Not only this, but a cancer fastened itself on to the breast of her dearest friend, Vale Carson.

Columbia obeyed the call of duty. Here were suffering creatures entitled to her sympathy. She turned to them with the unselfish affection which was one of her strong points. Suddenly a great blow fell

upon her. Of all those who were near and dear, her eldest brother, Robert Elson, had the first place in her heart. He was brought home mangled and dead. A heavy package, which was being lowered from a warehouse crane, had fallen upon him as he walked underneath. Almost at the same time came news that her dearly loved cousin and cradle-companion, Josephine, after breaking blood-vessel upon blood-vessel, had passed away.

Death was not satisfied. Columbia's godchild, a beautiful little girl, upon whom she was accustomed to lavish many kisses, was taken, while in her arms, with convulsive fits and expired. This was too mysterious. Columbia remembered what Harry Gover had said about Rael Orma. That individual hovered about her constantly. What might this mean? Did he then love any member of her family, and was this the cause of all these misfortunes? There was Beatrice Elson, a girl of remarkable beauty.

"Is there anything between you and Rael Orma?" asked Columbia.

"No," answered Beatrice. "I should have thought it was the other way."

"What do you mean?"

"He never looks at any other woman when you are present."

The questioner shuddered at the idea thus suggested, and then dismissed it as too horrible to be entertained.

Beatrice now fell sick. The doctor did not know what to make of her case, but considered that her symptoms pointed to blood-poisoning. Columbia

acted as nurse, and, being full of sisterly love, would every now and then caress the sick girl. At last the latter said,—

“Don’t! oh, don’t!”

“Don’t what, dear?”

“Your kisses,” sobbed Beatrice, “make me feel so bad.”

Columbia was startled, and began to reflect deeply. She recollected that Vale Carson, though never repelling the proffered caresses, ever and anon put her hand to her bosom, as if experiencing increased pain. Now what had Harry Gover said? Full of agony and despair, she tackled Rael Orma the next time he came into her presence. This was in a parlour of the family residence. The room communicated with a smaller apartment, and the two were separated by a curtain. Behind this curtain Vale Carson stood listening. The first words of the conversation arrested her attention, especially as she had heard something of Rael Orma. Having been about to enter when the conversation commenced, she had partly unfolded the curtain, and could, therefore, see the speakers.

“Mr. Orma,” said Columbia, “excuse my asking an impertinent question, but were you in love with my aunt Maude?”

“I was.”

“And all her relations, all her friends, died before her, did they not?”

“Every person embraced by her died before she had attained her twenty-seventh year. Her three

brothers, who were drowned eighteen years ago, were the last survivors. Her sisters and best-loved friends died before she was twenty-one."

"Well," exclaimed Columbia, "many of those whom I love are suffering, and some of them have died. Can you explain how these misfortunes have so suddenly come upon me and mine?"

"From the same cause."

"What! that you—you—how can I say it?"

"I know what you mean. Yes, it is so. The woman *I* love is as a poison to those whom *she* loves. Every one she has kissed will die thereof, some of them quickly, some by slow degrees, but all will have vanished in a very few years. Eight it was in your aunt Maude's case; and that is about the general maximum."

"Then," said Columbia, looking at him steadily, "*I* am at present the object of your love?"

"Yes, you are."

Vale Carson heard the avowal with horror.

"What is your price wherewith the lives of those I love may be purchased?"

"You mistake," replied Rael Orma. "I do not act as one in malice. For successive generations I have loved a particular woman, but only because thereto urged by what is my nature. My love has always brought calamities, but not through any wish of mine."

"You have no power, then, to put a stop to the misery you cause?"

"I have not; but you have."

"How is that?"

"Your kiss, so fatal to others, would destroy me, and mine would destroy you. I am willing to be thus destroyed. I made a similar offer to your aunt, but she refused."

"I should kiss you and die?"

"Yes; and you would not even have a grave. We should both disappear out of existence."

"If I loved any one without kissing them, how then?"

"They would sustain no harm. To explain why, I should have to go into my history, of which there is no need."

"And the sacrifice, if made, would it save those friends that remain? For instance, would Vale Carson's cancer go away?"

"Almost certainly. Is she much to you?"

"Very dear indeed."

"Then undoubtedly her malady springs from your kisses. It would depart when I am no longer in existence, and your relations would in like manner recover from their various illnesses, so far as the same have arisen from my influence acting through you."

Vale Carson listened and trembled. She kept herself in readiness to prevent any such fatal caress as the monster proposed, supposing that her friend should be so mad as to agree.

Columbia reflected, and her thoughts may easily be guessed. Life was precious in her eyes; and that not only as natural at nineteen years of age, but

because of Paul Comyng. No kisses had so far passed between them. Why such signs of affection must be refrained from could be explained to him, and then a long career of happiness lay before them ; but every one she had embraced, viz., all her near relations and dearest friends, would speedily die,—in eight or nine years at the most, and not one would be left. Moreover, this fateful being would go on slaying his victims in every generation, until some woman should be found brave enough to make the necessary sacrifice, That she might live, her brothers, sisters, friends, cousins, as also many of their little ones, whom she had caressed, must perish. Should she weigh her own life against theirs, not to speak of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of human beings yet to be born ? No ; she would not be guilty of such selfishness. She would be the unknown benefactress of many yet to exist, the same as her dead aunt might have been ; while as to Paul Comyng, alas ! it must be. As it was to be done, better at once, lest any further death took place through delay.

To this conclusion came Columbia ; and, turning quietly to Rael Orma, she said, “I am willing to comply with your request.”

He replied, “I am very grateful ; existence has never been a source of pleasure to me,” and then advanced. But out of her hiding-place sprang Vale Carson, who, twining her arms round Columbia, cried, “You shall not make this horrible sacrifice. What has to be borne by me, I am willing to bear ; and so must all others. Oh, Columbia, think of Plau

Comyng! His feelings towards you he has confessed to me. It will be an awful blow to him; and why should he be made unhappy, so good as he is too?"

"Make her let go," said Columbia to Rael; "but do not hurt her."

"Sit down there," he said, pointing to a sofa.

Vale let go, and, staggering to the sofa, sat down. She felt herself without power, either to disobey the command or to raise an alarm.

"Good-bye, dear Vale," said Columbia; "think of me when I am gone." Then to Rael Orma, "I am ready."

Vale Carson saw them kiss, and immediately they were not. No trace remained of either. Columbia had even carried Paul Comyng's ring into the nothingness which had overtaken her.

A DUEL.

THERE were heard in the mansion of Zara the sounds of laughter, dance, and song. Its hundred windows were ablaze with light, and far away through the blackness of night could be seen the splendour of their golden glory. The peasants of the valley, hastening homewards through the dark lanes after their day's labours, looked up with envious wonder, and then sighing, separated for their lowly cottages. There was little in common between these miserable toilers and Zara, the worshipper of Joy: for them the gall, and for him the mead, of existence. His twelve daughters were all present, some of them leaning on their husbands' arms; others, the merry tyrants of those whom they had conquered, and with whom they were soon to be united. The worshipper of Joy had but one daughter left to give away, and this was his youngest, the fairy-footed Lillah. The poet Zumella had attacked her; and even now they were treading together the enchanted, whirling maze, the while he anointed her ears with choicest honey.

Every of Zara's guests, save one, was full of

mirthful contentment, as became those who were invited to those halls of laughter. The host, in the glory of his sixty years of happiness, was well fitted to be president there. With his round, rosy face, set like a cameo of mirth in its framework of light golden hair, and his blue eyes dancing in unchained glee, it would seem impossible that any should in his presence refuse to offer sacrifice to Optima. But there was one, the youth Hermyn, who took no part in the revelry which surrounded him. With his dark eyes, pale face, sombre attire, and mournful expression, he looked conspicuously out of place in that gay company. To him came the master of the house.

"Well, Hermyn, we shall conquer you, I think; and you shall yet drink of the fountain of Joy."

"Have you had those waters analyzed?" asked Hermyn.

"No," replied Zara, with merry scorn. "Are they poisonous?"

"They are."

"Well, I have drunk of them all my life, and cannot be said to have sustained any harm therefrom. What ill-effects do you ascribe to them?"

"Death."

"But I am not dead yet, you see."

"There are two deaths, and worms for each."

"Ha! ha! Here, Zumella and Lillah, see what you can do with my gloomy young friend. Shame on us if we cannot exorcise the melancholy spirit that troubles him."

Zumella came, a young man, handsome and graceful, with eyes shining like jewels; Lilla also, dancing gaily to the spot, her light feet seeming to play havoc with the ancient laws of gravitation. Gloriously beautiful was she, not in voluptuous and full-bosomed enchantments, but in the chaste perfection of her form and features. She appeared as if sculptured after a superior design to that according to which other women had been shaped. Her eyes, and the cloud of golden hair which hung about her shoulders, were by inheritance from Zara; but the blue was bluer, and the gold more golden. On each cheek was a delicate, filmy blush; but the snow-queen had kissed her neck. To her partners in the dance she was so light as to seem of gossamer, and her heels were little more than ornaments, for all night long she could float about on tiptoe.

Said Zumella, "Of what are you made, Hermyn? Did the giant Despair, coming by, woo the dryad Melancholy, she who sits ever bathing her feet in the lake of Sorrow, which she ceases not to replenish with her tears? Were you the fruit of that woful union? Did the bitter milk of her shrivelled paps nourish your babyhood, and were you afterwards weaned on the pangs of those who writhe in agony when the battle is over? Surely for lullabies you must have been rocked to sleep with the shrieks of the drowning, and your alphabetical songs must have been catalogues of every human misfortune.

Him regarded Hermyn with reproachful compassion,

as he replied, "Even according to that manner would I have been born and bred, so that I laugh not at the sorrows of the sorrowful."

Upon which Lillah, "Outside of this house is such misery, then?"

"There is; and amongst those who weep I wish to dwell, in order that I may minister to them."

"But," said she, "here you are among those who worship Joy. Why not be joyous with us?"

"Because you adore a phantom; because I see a skeleton enthroned in the hall, and not all your garlands can hide its ghastliness from me."

Then Zara laughed. "See what spectacles he wears! Through them even Aphrodite would seem uglier than the old hag down in the valley—she whose nose tickles her chin—and whose face kisses her knees."

"Even so; for I have seen that aged woman give bread to the hungry."

"We shall have him on his marrow-bones yet," said Zara, "Optima's liveliest worshipper; and penitent smiles shall light up those meagre cheeks. Come, you two, set your wits to work."

Said Zumella, "I will be very generous. Here, Lillah, I resign your hand for the next dance: you shall capture Hermyn. Come, step it with him. An' he recant not his heresy after one whirl with you, I shall cry 'A miracle!'"

"Will you?" asked Lillah of Hermyn, in tones dangerously bewitching. Death himself, one would imagine, could not have resisted the intoxicating

sweetness which wreathed her coral lips, but must have given up his victims if so entreated.

Hermyn gazed at the lovely temptress, with the undaunted freedom of one who possessed his soul in quiet assurance; and still he looked collecting, as in a mental vase, the fulness of her enchanting beauty. Then, while a dark, mysterious light wandered from his solemn eyes, he said,—

“Yes, I will. But bethink you that the feet you would conquer have walked in the alleys of the poor, and that the hand you would touch hath closed the eyes of the dying. I speak not as boasting; but he who hath knelt swooning in the incense-filled sanctuary of Charity, whose heart hath been set on fire by the fierce flames of Compassion, may have power to vanquish rather than that he should be overcome.”

“Are you so *very* dangerous?” answered Lillah, her musical voice trilling with mirth.

“I have warned you. To the dance, if you will.”

“Oh, yes,” she said, and her silvery laughter rippled through the air. “I would not dance with any one else now, for the world. A duel let it be, to the death. Joy against Grief. He is caught,” she whispered to Zara; and the worshipper smiled back in return,—

“Yes, I think we have captured him now.”

Hermyn took Lillah by the waist; and the rest of the company left off dancing, to look at them. Then an uncomfortable feeling stole through the room, for Lillah seemed a slave in the hands of the stern youth.

She, who was wont to whirl her partners here and there at her own free will, now submitted to a quiet and wave-like step, such as, though not ungraceful, seemed full of sadness. Wonderful was it to see Hermyn and Lillah floating through the room, upon his face a still, restful expression, and upon hers, falling down over it like a veil, a modest, pensive look, never seen there before. Zara stared in wonder, and then said,—

“Come, Zumella, play them something lively. This won’t do.”

The poet sat down, but his accomplished fingers seemed not under his own control. Solemn and sad were the sounds that ascended from the instrument; mournful and sick grew the hearts of the guests; dim and dimmer became the lights.

Asked Hermyn of Lillah, as they glided round the hall, “What think you now?”

“Teach me,” she whispered, “to love the better life.”

“Will you,” he said, “mingle your tears with those of the sorrowful?”

“Yes,” she murmured; “let me weep with them.”

“Those eyes that have fed on the admiration of men, will they now convey messages of love to the sick; those ears which with pleasure have drunk the poison of flattery, will they at length be open to the moanings of the suffering; those lips which have loved kisses, and whence light, frivolous words have issued, will they now comfort the dying; those hands, now white with idleness, will they make clothes for

the naked, and wash the vermin-covered babe, the uncared-for child of shame?"

"Yes; let me be your apprentice in all the works of mercy."

"Will you, then, leave these halls of glaring light"—here, as if at his command, and that she might make a full sacrifice (if any) the room suddenly resumed its normal brilliancy—"will you leave them, and come to my home in the gloomy valley?"

"Yes; take me away—take me to your home."

Thereupon Hermyn led the bright Lillah away from the garish mansion, and took her to his own house.

Thenceforth she abode with him, and ministered to the poor; and she became more to them than her dark-eyed spouse had been. His sympathy for them was a deep, consuming passion, and as such oppressive; so they loved her better. The burden of their griefs sat ever heavy on his spirit; hence, though his works benefited them, yet his presence worked not such consolation as hers did. He saw, and was not displeased. To him it was much that her gentle smiles were as balm to the weary, her loving words an unfailing anodyne for the pains of the suffering, her small hand cooler than ice to the foreheads of the fever-stricken.

And did Lillah ever long for the joys she had left behind? Never. Sometimes, when Zara's hundred windows blazed with golden light, she would say to her husband, to the mournful Hermyn, "Look, they are making revelry to-night."

"Yes," he would reply. "Distress stalks through

the land; but what care they? Starvation and Disease, wandering forth hand-in-hand, kill their thousands; but the sons of selfishness cease not to dance and sing. It is well that you came from out of their midst."

"Yes," she would answer, looking at him fondly, "it is very well."

It was indeed; for they lived the nobler life, and their reward was in the fruits of their works.

A NICE GAME.

“WANT a razor-strop?” said Woodville. “Certainly. Death: sharpen your wits on that.”

It was the usual weekly meeting of that choice little society, “The Moonrakers,” and the after-supper carouse had begun. White-haired Goodman, of the three chins, was chairman—he who joyously carried his fourscore years and twenty stone. In the vice-chair sat the melancholy Woodville, whose jokes none could resist but himself, and whose mournfully told stories always kept the whole room in a jovial uproar. A pensive poisoner of souls was Woodville, and a pathetic defiler of youthful ears. Also present were the ever-witty Hilton; Roby, always good-natured, drunk or sober; Vermont, the chameleon, now compunctious and now beastly, sometimes working in tears to repair the evil he had done, and anon laying devilish snares for the innocent; Volney, the giant, well known abroad as one who had never let man’s life or woman’s virtue stand in the way of his wishes; on his brow was the plain stamp of Cain, and out of his mouth constantly

poured words blacker than even Woodville cared to bring forth. There were others in the room, more or less evil spirits all, excepting, however, Ross, a handsome boy of eighteen, who, so far, was not guilty of anything save being in such company. Also may be excepted a stranger, of gloomy aspect, who sat sternly listening to the ribaldry that floated about the room. The chairman, noting that this person took no part in the general merriment, asked Hilton who he was.

"Don't know," was the reply. "Suppose some fellow brought him in. A regular wet blanket he is. Perhaps, unlike blankets generally, he'll grow warmer as he gets wetter."

"Ha! ha!" said Goodman, "it is to be hoped so. But, if he continues to look so black, he'll make us look blue—always excepting Roby and his nose."

"Deceiver as he is of the birds, who think they see a fine ripe strawberry. Ross also must be kept out of the reckoning: nothing would make him look otherwise than very green."

"Well," asked Woodville, "what of Death? The chairman first."

Said Goodman, "A bill I should like to dishonour, though I have never had one protested yet."

Observed Hilton, "A girl I do not want to kiss—proof positive of her ugliness."

Continued Woodville, "Life's piquant sauce."

Remarked Roby, "A good friend sometimes. At least, I thought so when Uncle Ned died, and his will was opened."

Followed on Vermont, "A harvest: as you have sown, so shall you reap. Take it out of that"; and he brought his hand down heavily on the table.

Roared Volney, "A bravo who stabs you in the dark."

The others contributed their quota; and then Woodville inquired, "Well, Ross, what say you?"

The youth hesitated, but, being pressed, faltered out, "It's another world, and I hope 'tis as far off as the Pole-star."

Here Hilton whispered to Goodman, "Can't you make that owl give us some of his wisdom?"

"Good," said the chairman; "so I will." Then, addressing the dark stranger courteously, "May we not hope, sir, that you will put some salt in the broth?"

Replied the unknown guest, "I am afraid I must be very commonplace. 'Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise.'"

They all stared at him with blank disdain. The weakest wit there looked down on one who could say nothing better than that.

"Pooh!" said Hilton to Goodman, "it's always the way with fellows of that kind. Looking more sage than is possible, they prove duller than is conceivable."

Continued the stranger, "But if any of you, being happily ignorant, desire to be foolishly wise, there is a way."

"As how?" asked Woodville.

"*Experientia docet*," replied the other. "I am

just returning to Death-land, and shall be glad of the company of any one desiring to study its geography."

"He must be a madman," thought his hearers. However, they all turned pale, except Woodville and Volney. The former silently observed the mysterious speaker; the latter, laughing loudly, said, "Gratitude for such a kind offer causes me to ask the name of him who makes it."

"The ancients called me Charon; but there is nothing in a name."

"Just so," said Volney. "By any other name you would look as handsome, no doubt. However, if I understand rightly, you manage a passenger traffic, with a through ticket for the ferry over the Styx?"

"That is so."

"Credentials, if you please?"

"Certainly. A very reasonable request, I must admit." Here the speaker, unbuttoning waistcoat and shirt, disclosed—a skeleton!

The carousers now looked sick with terror, saving Woodville, who thoughtfully stroked his moustache, and Volney, who, taking up a glass, said, "Here's a health to King Death, coupled with the name of his representative, Mr. Charon. Musical honours, it ought to be." Here he looked scornfully round at the affrighted company, and sang, in a rich, full voice, "For he's a jolly good fellow, for he's a jolly good fellow, for he's a jolly good fellow; and so say all of us. With a hip, hip, hurrah! hurrah! hurrah! One cheer more. Hurrah!" And he sat down, scowling at the white faces around.

Said the stranger to him, "May I expect the pleasure of your company?"

"Yes," answered Volney, "in the order of nature, when the black blood ceases to be oxygenized."

"And you?" addressing Woodville.

"Thank you; when the lease is determined, I shall be ready to leave my earthly tenement."

"Will no one accompany me?" looking round at the others. "Really, I cannot submit to such disappointment: I must either take one or all."

"You mean that?" asked Volney.

"Yes, I am afraid so."

"Well, we shall want proof of your power."

This the unwelcome guest readily afforded; for, breathing, he diffused gas, which, entering the lungs of the carousers, seemed likely to suffocate the lot. They stared helplessly at each other's blackening faces, and cowered in abject terror; save that Woodville, leaning back, resigned himself calmly to his fate. But the strong-willed Volney, speaking with an effort, muttered, "All right; that will do." Whereupon the obnoxious intruder discontinued his unpleasant exhalations, and the poisonous gas ascended slowly to the ceiling.

"Well now, who will go with me?"

"Why," said Volney, "the die shall decide that. Let every one have his fair chance, and then no one can complain." Here he seized a dice-box, and handed it to Goodman, saying, "Age first. Highest thrower to be the victim, I suppose?" To which Mr. Charon graciously nodded his assent.

The old gentleman took the box in his trembling fingers, and threw two aces. The danger being past, he was very brave, and, chuckling jovially, observed, "That makes two; but I won't say deuce take them!"

Hilton, throwing, made five, and sank back into his chair relieved. Barring the marvellous, he was all right.

Volney now took the box, rattled the dice vigorously, and, laughing loudly, cried, "This is a fine game; I'm d——d if it isn't. Only three? Why, there must be some little cherub aloft, looking after poor Volney."

Vermont made ten. There were some good points about the man. He sighed, and said, "Most likely I shall have to go. Perhaps it is as well: I have done enough evil in this world."

With softened face and closed eyes, he murmured something. Interior preparations were evidently going on.

There were several other throws, but all below Vermont's. At last Woodville took the box: a six and a five. After quietly drinking up his wine, he commenced putting on his gloves, at the same time observing, "They are of the right colour."

Two or three more casts, but they did not affect the result, and now there was only Ross left. With shaking hands, but still hopefully having regard to Woodville's figure, the boy threw; and then sank back fainting in his chair, for he had made TWELVE.

Sorrow filled the eyes of every one. There was no one present but wished that—of course excluding

himself—it had been any one else upon whom the fatal lot had fallen.

Said the stranger in a hard voice (there was evidently no compassion about *him*), “Well, young sir, we will, if you please, depart, and leave these gentlemen to their pleasures.”

“Oh, let me stay!” whimpered the boy. “It’s very hard : I am so young, and have seen so little of this beautiful world.”

“Am afraid I cannot oblige. Come, you must make haste ; my time is valuable, and I have wasted too much of it here.”

“Oh, I cannot go!” said the boy, now shrieking in an agony of terror. “It will kill my mother. I am her only child : she has no one but me to love.”

“I am rather partial to an only child,” observed the other, drily. Then with exceeding firmness, “I wait no longer : come !”

The youth, who seemed devoid of power to resist the command, rose with white face and shaking limbs, when Woodville intervened.

“Must it be so?” he asked, in a sweet, wooing tone, that no one had ever heard him use before. “Is there no way to save him from the fate which he deems so dreadful? I know his mother : she is a widow, quite alone in the world.”

“There is a way, certainly.”

“Yes ; what is it?”

“Well, I do not mind taking you in his stead. Do you agree?”

“No,” replied Woodville, in a clear, cold voice,

"I am too selfish for that. My evil life must roll on until, its natural impetus being spent, the day arrives which shall see one villain less in the world"; and, smiling darkly, he resumed his seat.

"Well, I ought to be off; but feel inclined for a bit of barter. Now, you, sir," addressing the chairman, "you, as an octogenarian, could do a good action without much loss to yourself. I will take you in exchange for this young whimperer. There now."

"I am not eighty," quavered Goodman; "nor seventy until next birthday."

"Indeed! that's news to me." Here he took out some ebony tablets. "Yes, I was right; born 1st June, 1792. Your doubts upon that head being removed, of course you will willingly come. It will be something to have a widow's blessing, you know."

"I shan't go," squeaked Goodman. "The dice have decided. I took my chance with the rest, and that's sufficient."

"Then, as I can do no business, we must be off"; this to Ross, who totteringly walked towards him.

"Stop!" cried Volney. "Will you take any of us in his place?"

"Certainly," replied Charon, cheerfully. "What do you say, gentlemen?" Here he eyed the revellers inquiringly. The giant also looked towards them, a brutal sneer playing about his thick lips. There was a universal shrinking.

"Thought so!" thundered out Volney. "What's

the use of your asking such a precious set of cowards ? The boy shall not die. I will go."

"You ?" said Charon, eyeing him curiously.

"Yes, I. You will of course lose by the exchange ; but that is your look-out. Well, let's start."

"You are about the last man in the company whom I should have expected to volunteer." Here he again referred to his tablets. "Yes, the very last man."

"Humph! I suppose you have got it all down there ; but, at any rate, no one will be able to say of me that I shrank from saving a poor, trembling, innocent boy ; the only child, too, of a widowed mother. Good-bye," extending his hand to Ross ; "and, if you'll take my advice, you will get out of this hell in a twinkling."

Ross grasped his benefactor's hand convulsively, and, doing as he was bid, hurried from the room.

"Now then, sir, lead the way. Farewell, brother blackguards" ; and, following in Charon's wake, the giant went out, slamming the door to with a bang that set all the glasses ringing.

This was the last that any one ever saw of Volney.

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THE TWO ESPOUSALS.

THE young, rich, and handsome Raymond went into foreign parts, and, coming back again, brought with him a wife. Every one looked with delight on Raymond's bride; for her golden hair hung down over her shoulders, her blue eyes were full of laughing light, her red lips seemed to say, "Kiss me and be merry." From the time of their arrival continual revelry was kept in the mansion of the happy husband, and among all the dancers there was no one who footed it so lightly as the beautiful bride. A year passed by, and she bore him a child. But what made the midwives look so grave; and why did Raymond's heart turn sick with despair? Alas! the babe was born weeping: its cheeks were pale, its forehead bore the marks of anguish; and the mother, looking upon her unfavoured offspring, straightway expired.

Raymond buried his bride, and going away again was not seen for many years. When he returned, there came with him a stern-faced companion, dressed

in black. She looked upon him with no eyes of love, and from her rigid mouth issued no words of endearment. This was Raymond's second wife ; and, gazing upon her, his friends fell away, while his tenants shook their heads, saying, " A severe mistress he has brought with him this time." She proved so, indeed, and a reproachful one withal. Often was she heard to upbraid him in bitter tones, saying, " Raymond, you are a coward : your heart is cruel ; your eyes lustful ; your lips untruthful."

After a time the dependents on the estate began to like her ; for she was kind to them, though not to her husband. " Raymond," she would say, " you shall not ruin that innocent girl ; you shall not oppress that poor cottager. Do you see that weeping widow and those hungry orphans ? go immediately and solace them in their distress ; those old people, too, must be housed. ' They can go to the work-house,' you say. No, they shall not go there while you have money that you want to squander in pleasure. Now come with me, for there are the sick to visit. What are those mutterings ? ' You wish to follow the hunters' horn.' Nay, but you shall not while there is better work to be done." She never entreated, but always commanded ; never used soft words, but always harsh ones ; never tried to please him, and had no winning ways about her. Mostly he sullenly obeyed, but sometimes rebelled ; upon which, sternly frowning, she would say, " Take your choice, do it or not ; but mark you," and here something was whispered that never failed of inducing

submission. This might not be willingly accorded, but to her that seemed indifferent.

In this way many years passed by, and very melancholy they were to Raymond; for, while his dictatorial spouse bore him no offspring, the unhappy daughter of his first wife grew up very, very ugly, and, being in constant pain, wept continually; so that every one said it would be a mercy if she were taken, and Raymond agreed with them.

Twenty years, all of them dull and monotonous, had elapsed, when it happened one night that Raymond's wife brought forth a child. She had not informed him of her pregnant condition, and he had suspected nothing of the kind,—in fact, had given up all hopes of her proving fruitful. There was no one present at the birth save the first wife's sorrowful daughter, and she acted as midwife.

Raymond trembled with apprehension when the babe was brought to him, but, seeing it, was filled with delight. "I have had an angel born to me," he said; and he might well say so, for more than mortal was the beauty of the child's countenance, and not of earth the light which shone from its quiet eyes. Then, taking the new-comer from its sister's hands, he kissed it; whereupon the sweet little thing twined its arms very lovingly round his neck, causing him to feel a serene happiness such as cannot be described. Going to his wife, another surprise awaited him, for she was no longer stern and imperious. Receiving him with much gentleness, she said, "You have been faithful to me; be so still, that

it may always be well with you. Know also this, that Joy brings forth Grief; but who espouses Duty, to him shall be born Peace."

Then the mournful step-sister of the new-born babe kissed it, and died.

THE DARK MAIDEN.

SILVERIUS started from the village of Pueritia for the city of Sheol. Advisers as to the best outfit were numerous. Every one, indeed, had his own idea. Silverius went forward. Occasionally he met a stray beggar. With such a one he divided what was in his wallet, as, indeed, seemed only natural. Why should he eat to repletion, while perishing wayfarers looked with keen, pleading eyes at his provender? Sometimes he came across a wailing child which had lost its nurse. It seemed to Silverius a matter of mere elementary duty that he should take hold of the little one's hand, and go in search of the negligent guardian. There were other persons travelling to Sheol, and they appeared to view these proceedings with much amusement.

"You do not," they said to Silverius, "understand the rule of the road."

"I am very ignorant," he answered: "you must excuse me. What rule is that?"

"Let every one take care of himself."

"Does that mean I am to pass by a starving mendicant, and take no notice?"

"The mendicant, like every one else, must take care of himself."

"And I am to see a child in distress without doing anything?"

"The persons chargeable with the infant must see after it. No business of yours."

Silverius did not understand such notions. However, these persons seemed wise, and they must know best, so he would follow their counsels—a resolution easier made than carried into effect. Wistful eyes and tear-stained cheeks always proved too much for the soft-hearted youth, and he still, though with blushes, continued to relieve the distressful as he went along.

Occasionally maidens, neatly shaped, and otherwise comely to look at, made their appearance. Silverius always turned his eyes aside, which sign of diffidence created much merriment in the company, most of whom made themselves very agreeable to the damsels, nor refrained from fond caresses.

"And is that right?" asked Silverius.

"Right! Ha! ha! Why, Modesty, are we to travel along this dreary road, and have no pleasure?"

"But I thought we should be questioned at the journey's end as to all these things?"

"Pooh! time enough when we get near the city to consider about such matters."

Silverius was not particularly satisfied with this answer. How could it be time enough, seeing that an account would have to be rendered of each day's doings? So he decided to travel alone. From time to time he came up to bands of pilgrims.

"Are you for the city of Sheol?" they asked.

"Yes, I am."

"And do you not fear the terrible maiden?"

"Yes; she is very stern, they say."

"Stern!—she is more like a cruel tigress than anything else."

Silverius turned pale.

"And has she no compassion?" he asked.

"None whatever. She is the sworn foe of every traveller. Hence we take what enjoyment we can on the way. Ha! there is some luscious fruit. Come along; we'll have a feast."

"But we musn't: that is forbidden fruit."

No attention was paid to his remonstrances, and they all rushed to have a share. One good-natured fellow, catching hold of Silverius, said, "Come, my boy, don't let them have all the good things." But the youth shook his head, and got away.

He travelled along, counting each milestone with fear; for they testified how far off was the happy village, and how near the strange city, which no one seemed to know anything about. The dread portress, too: Silverius's heart sank within him as he thought

of her. Every one he met had tales to tell of the maiden's cruelty. Some of them had been eye-witnesses of her savage doings.

The end now approached very near, and pallid horror sat on every cheek. At last the lodge was in sight, and the various travellers had to wait each for his turn to be admitted. One by one Silverius's companions were taken away, nearly all of them shrieking with terror as the messengers of the dark maiden came for them. The assembled pedestrians were near enough to hear her solemn voice proclaiming, "Woe to the unjust and the untrue, the selfish and the proud; woe, and bitter woe, to the impure!"

At last came a summons for Silverius. Trembling with intense fear, he accompanied the messenger, and soon found himself in the presence of the dark-robed maiden. Piteously he looked up into her majestic eyes, the while he gasped out, "Mercy." She gazed at him very fondly, and in silvery tones asked,—

"Have you been selfish or proud, untrue or unjust?"

"I have tried not to be," he answered.

"And have you been unchaste?"

"I have always loved purity."

"Then why do you tremble, gentle youth?"

"Because they told me you were stern and merciless."

"Not to such as you. Now rest you here, while I make out the record which shall cause you to be received with much honour in the city."

Silverius laid himself down on a couch of black velvet which stood near; and the maiden, drawing over him a coverlet composed of violets, whispered, "Rest in peace." She then kissed the youth lovingly, placed her hand softly on his forehead, and he slept.

THE END.

